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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [SL](#)
SUBJECT: SIERRA LEONE STABILITY IV: CONCLUSIONS

REF: A. 09 FREETOWN 465
[1](#)B. 09 FREETOWN 466
[1](#)C. 09 FREETOWN 471

Classified By: Political/Economic Officer Amy LeMar for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

[1](#)1. (C) As reftels have shown Sierra Leone is faced with challenges and threats to short- and long-term stability. Perhaps the greatest hallmark of Sierra Leonean governance at the moment is that it is driven and supported by individuals, rather than institutions or ideologies. Reminiscent of the country's cultural heritage, in which communities' fortunes rested in the hands of the Paramount Chief, government and party structures focus power in the hands of very few, who either refuse or fear to delegate. There are few checks and balances that cannot be bought or sold, and resources are insufficient to combat cultural acceptance of corruption or fully equip the untrained and unmotivated civil service.

[1](#)2. (C) Without checks and balances or the expectation of impartiality and reason, the system is bound to be fraught with the same foibles and frailties as the people who embody it: fatigue, irrationality, and greed set against an opaque backdrop of internal tension and cohesion created by family dramas, history, personal slights, ethnicity, regionalism, etc. As observers, members of the international community can clearly see the results of this system. Promoting development becomes a constant battle, to be fought again and again over time, with changing weapons and players but consistent outcomes. Our inability to attack root problems means that even strategies that take these issues into account are limited in their effectiveness, and programs that do not are doomed from the start.

[1](#)3. (C) The UK attempted a multi-pronged approach by investing in institutions and also supporting individuals they deem appropriate, but even some British interlocutors have conceded that the short-term results are mixed and the long-term results uncertain. Some believe that they underestimated the role self-interest plays in local decision-making, and they see the tendency for even the most educated and informed government officials to rely on their personal connections and obligations rather than pragmatism, logic, or a sense of national duty.

[1](#)4. (C) This plays out not only in government ministries, but between parties. Sierra Leonean political strategy sometimes seems to be a "race to the bottom," wherein opposition parties (regardless of who is in power) would rather undermine development efforts and spotlight the ruling party's failures than support positive change and rightfully assume part of the credit. This holds true even within parties, where it appears rivals will cut each other off at the knees behind closed doors regardless of the collateral damage, and only marginally close ranks in public. This has a deleterious impact on governance decisions, since no one has national best interests at heart, and in fact deliberately creating new hardships is seen as an opportunity to praise or

criticize. In short, Sierra Leone's political leaders are generally a hindrance to economic and social development, rather than a help.

15. (C) The capacity for Sierra Leone to absorb any kind of shock is therefore low: tension in Guinea, external economic pressures, and even the 2012 elections represent potential damage to this under-performing system. Sierra Leone is ill-equipped to handle the potential spill-over of Guinean violence and refugees: indeed, the country has insufficient financial and operational resources to handle its own poverty, floundering economy, and potential for crisis in the build-up to 2012.

16. (C) Comment: Sierra Leonean stability exists because of a delicate equilibrium between a variety of issues and interests. Public will for peaceful development along with donor support created this balance in the aftermath of the war, but development and support are not mutually exclusive: without national will, there would be no donor support, and without donor support, national will is likely to evaporate. But forces are converging on both elements that put Sierra Leonean stability at risk: donors have less funds to provide for the numerous needs, and political connivance and self-interest, as well as economic desperation, undermines the collective will for peace. In the short-term, any factor or combination of factors could bring about a devolution, and the international community needs to be prepared to provide a targeted reaction that will at least address the catalytic problems, if not the underlying ones. In the long-term, though, endemic corruption will likely be the country's greatest destabilizing factor, as it prevents tangible,

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universal development. The reliance of development partners on a few key people with integrity and vision (such as President Koroma, Anti-Corruption Commissioner Abdul Tejan-Cole, and Chief Justice Umu Hawa Tejan-Jalloh) may not be enough to counter-balance the challenges Sierra Leone now faces.

17. (C) Comment continued: Sierra Leone's development partners are left with few options, but the presence of a handful of senior leaders dedicated to their nation's future, while sadly an historic anomaly, is an opportunity that points a way forward. While democracy and governance programs will continue to struggle to affect overarching change, and the resources to expand agricultural productivity remain limited, programs that focus on the provision of services -- health, education, and infrastructure -- may provide better opportunities for long-term impact. Educational programs such as the Ambassador's Girl's Scholarship Program (AGSP), Fulbright scholarships, and others should be expanded, to create the critical mass of future leaders needed to ensure a stable Sierra Leone that is part of the solution, rather than a part of the problem, in West Africa. END COMMENT.
FEDZER